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ABSTRACT

When the faculty of a degree-awarding distance education institution is assembled, it is essential to meet the credentialing requirements established by the accrediting commission of the Distance Education and Training Council and the various state educational councils. It is also important to find faculty applicants with a love of teaching, instructional skills, and a consummate knowledge of their subject(s). When American Military University (AMU) began assembling its faculty, it soon became clear that the simplest solution was to leave faculty where they were and let them teach at a distance, from a distance. Once the obstacle of the necessity of physically assembling a faculty at one location had been removed, the search for a faculty became a search for the best-qualified, best-credentialed subject specialist teachers for each subject taught at the university. Among the faculty development guidelines emerging from AMU's experience are the following: include a provision for assessing faculty members' ability to work independently; implement an effective, graduated course development process; institute a continuing faculty assessment program; establish a program to keep faculty apprised of university developments/policy changes; and standardize all procedures to ensure an error-free and seamless interface with each faculty member on an equal basis. (MN)

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DETC OCCASIONAL PAPER

Building a Distance Education Faculty

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DETC OCCASIONAL PAPER NUMBER 13

by

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Introduction

One of the principal, if not the primary, elements in distance education is the link established between the faculty member teaching a course and the student. When the distance study involves several disciplines, and is the path to a postsecondary degree, the selection and retention of a faculty capable of interfacing with a variegated and widely-dispersed student body becomes important. How a school goes about the task of assembling a faculty, especially a post-secondary level faculty, and the success it has, is directly related to a number of factors, not the least of which are: "Who is available, and are they going to be comfortable as a distance education faculty member?"

When American Military University was little more than a vision, the concept of what was needed as a faculty was also in embryonic form. What follows is an enumeration of the "lessons learned" in the assembly, training and activation of members of the AMU faculty and how the system has worked for us. It is probably worth noting at the outset that our task was made easier because the "jungle telegraph" in the military arts and sciences disciplines allows for the dissemination of rather explicit knowledge to and by any of its purveyors of who is doing what and where in the profession.

What is a Distance Learning Faculty?

By definition, a faculty is a "body of persons to whom are entrusted the government and instruction of a university or college." This is a straightforward expression of what people see a group of professors doing at any given moment during their careers. Straightforward, yes; accurate, not necessarily, especially in the realm of degree-awarding distance education institutions.

The inaccurate part of the definition deals with what it does not say; specifically, the lack of consideration of other factors such as credentials, teaching experience, and subject specialization that really have a major role in the make-up of the faculty. One might assume that these factors are intrinsic to the definition, but experience tends to dispute this. Not all PhDs can teach, and not all teachers are subject specialists. The basic rule is, **there is no rule**. Each faculty is assembled based on different standards and is often the result of pressures having little to do with education, but a lot to do with funding and politics. The old phrase "Publish or Perish" explains this phenomenon better than any other. Some years ago, I was having breakfast with two academic friends during a colloquy at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. One of my friends was a professor of French History, the other a History department chairman at a major southern university. I heard this conversation: "How is so and so doing?" "Oh, I had to let him go. You know, he only published two books in the last three years!" When I interjected and asked how he did as a teacher, I was told that was not important; his publication rate was all that mattered, because that was the basis for the department's funding.

The same may be said about subject specialization. A doctorate in History does not make you a specialist in all phases of the historical process.

Three Key Considerations

How does all this apply to a degree-awarding distance education institution? The answer is, dramatically. Not only must certain credentialing requirements (1) be met, both for the Accrediting Commission of DETC and the various educational councils of the several states, but a faculty applicant must be found who also possesses a love for, and a skill in, teaching (2), and a consummate

knowledge (subject specialization) (3) of the subject matter he or she is to impart to the students. Some traditional postsecondary teachers consider distance education as being somehow inferior "because you not in the same room with the student." For faculty members at AMU, this factor is of little concern and, because they are eminently qualified to teach their subjects, the distance element is merely a challenge to find non-traditional ways to impart traditional knowledge. Another aspect of this point is that the military arts and sciences are not taught at many schools outside the military community itself, even when the institution's faculty is blessed with the talent to be able to do so.

For most distance education schools, these considerations will assume different proportions and will often create different problems. The following are some of the solutions that one distance learning institution adopted in meeting these challenges.

Assembling a Faculty at a Distance

The study of the Military Arts and Sciences is a relatively narrow field, even though its complexity is such that subject specialization becomes a key issue. Other than coopting the faculty at one of the military academies, a group could not be put together that would resemble what would be needed to teach in postsecondary degree programs in this field. Other senior military service schools have excellent faculties, but most participants are subjects specialists while not, at the same time, holding the necessary credentials (most jurisdictions require terminal degrees to teach at the graduate level).

The issue here is "assembling" a faculty with both credentials and subject specialization. As Military History is a field of specialists, most of the better would-be faculty candidates are already employed, retired, or otherwise settled someplace else. To "assemble" people

of this caliber would have cost a considerable amount of money, both from the standpoint of pay and relocation allowances, and from the equally expensive view of having a large enough physical plant to offer the necessary work space to each on a more-or-less equal footing. The simplest solution was to leave the faculty **where they were** and let them teach at a distance, from a distance.

Having removed the obstacle of the necessity of physically assembling the faculty at one location, the search for a faculty became one of finding the best-qualified and credentialed subject specialist teacher for each of the subjects we knew had to be taught to give us a credible program—in the beginning, only at the graduate-level. The pursuit of a faculty, therefore, became one of using our "corporate" knowledge of the field to find these people.

The first phase was a two-fold effort. The Retired Officer Association (TROA)was approached through their TOPS (The Officer Placement System) Program with a list of specific requirements, including credentials. AMU needed people with graduate degrees who were, at the same time, subject specialists in the true sense of the word—their military careers were largely devoted to the field in which we wanted them to teach.

The second effort was through direct invitation to a wide range of people whom the executives at AMU had come to know over the years, who were either military professionals or members of the academic world, and were acknowledged authorities in their particular fields and who had the requisite credentials. These contacts generally came from such organizations as the United States Commission on Military History, the Society of Military History, and various other organizations. International contacts came from the Commission Internationale d'Histoire Militaire, which is an association of commissions from approximately 40 nations. Similar organizations

exist in most disciplines and are an excellent place to start one's search for faculty members.

These efforts led to the assembly of a small faculty of 25 members, including some of the "best names" in their fields. The latter effort produced most of the "names," but the former approach to TOPS (actually two requests) produced several highly competent faculty members. These methods are still being used by AMU and are still producing faculty candidates for specific requirements as they arise.

Another aspect of the faculty recruiting process involves "walk-ins." From the beginning, the faculty has expanded with the growth of the school. After the University had been established and had begun its academic program, and even though the school was not yet accredited, AMU began to receive inquiries from individuals who felt they had something to offer as faculty members. Letters have also been received from established professors at reputable, traditional universities recommending younger colleagues who might be interested in joining our faculty given the fact that such affiliation does not require relocation.

These recommendations also indicated that a few well-known and highly respected members of academic profession thought enough of distance education and the humble effort AMU was undertaking to proffer some of their better doctoral protégés. For those involved to any extent in the traditional academic world, it is a well-known tradition that professors are "responsible" for placing their doctoral students at "decent" universities. We consider such placement at a distance learning institution as at least tacit acknowledgment of distance education as a legitimate element of the postsecondary universe. All of this is also another example of the "jungle telegraph" at work.

Credentials

As alluded to above, the credentials issue is mandated not only by the Accrediting Commission of DETC, but also by the various state councils on higher education—as in the Commonwealth of Virginia. In almost all cases, the authorities require a terminal degree, that is, the highest degree awarded in the discipline to be taught. In the historical sciences, for instance, this would be the doctorate. Again, in the case of Virginia, the rules require a doctoral or other terminal degree or qualification for "faculty appointment by virtue of scholarly or **professional achievement**."

This is a fortuitous choice of words as there have been very few, if any, educational programs in the United States that produce graduate degrees in the military arts and sciences. Thus, while doctoral historians may specialize in military history, there are few, if any, universities that produce PhD's in, for instance, logistics or the operational arts. One rule is, therefore, that those courses that fall within the subject matter realms standard in the larger disciplines, may most often be filled from the general discipline. In other cases, however, where the subject for a course borders on the esoteric, other applications of the same rules and regulations must be applied. To fulfill course requirements related to subject areas specifically associated with the military arts and sciences, the use of those with scholarly or professional achievement in specific military fields becomes a necessity.

As an example of this application, a well-known and retired Army general officer was among the first faculty members recruited. He is an acknowledged authority on guerrilla warfare, and holds the Master's degree in International Relations. This individual was enlisted as a faculty member to fulfill a specific need for expertise in a relatively narrow field of specialization. Similarly, another retired

Army general officer with an MA was recruited because of his extensive background in the field of intelligence, and a retired Air Force officer (West Point graduate) with an MS in Aeronautical Engineering and extensive experience as a fighter pilot and commander was signed up to teach the History of Fighter Aviation.

A warning needs to be posted here. As we soon found out, there are credentials and then there are "credentials." Not only must you determine that your graduate student candidates attended **accredited** postsecondary educational institutions, but you must do the same thing with your faculty. When AMU started recruiting faculty, one applicant with a "PhD" looked perfect for a particular subject course we wanted to include in our program. The only problem was the school at which he took his doctorate was an unaccredited diploma mill and his degree, in the world of accreditation and licensing, was valueless. That one mistake on our part was quickly rectified and, because of that problem, and a lack of dedication to teaching, the individual was dropped, even before our enrollment phase began.

Subject Specialization

Subject specialization affects every institution in DETC in one way or another. Each school must approach this issue based upon its own requirements. I once was attended by an Army neurosurgeon who specialized in ailments of the right hand! He certainly knew how to deal with the left hand, but the right one was his specialty. Also, being a surgeon meant he was a Doctor of Medicine which at least theoretically meant he could treat, if not cure, a common cold. This allegory refers to the ability to find the most narrow-gauge specialty among an already assembled faculty body or, conversely, find the ability, for example, to teach basic English Composition in the person holding the Chair in Dead Languages at the University of Ulan Bator. Obvious, possibly, but not often recognized.

A Love of Teaching

The last element of the triad of considerations, and a very special one indeed, is found in the fact that the faculty candidate must have an innate skill at and love of teaching. The simplest way of explaining this is by exposing some of the negatives involved. There is no place on a distance education faculty for a **prima donna** who cannot be bothered with finding out what the students entrusted to his care needs. Similarly, the bully should not be tolerated. Neither can the reticent or timid help a program. Distance teaching requires innovation and, often, "going where no one has gone before." The person who is hesitant about trying new and innovative methods of imparting knowledge to students and, equally as important, sharing information on those techniques with the school and its other faculty members, helps defeat the dynamics of a process that has at its base the concept of invention that is an integral part of distance education. The profession is not yet old enough to allow institutional conservatism to prevail.

The faculty member who finds a way of unobtrusively injecting nonverbal cues into a lesson, or who develops a novel method for inserting student-stoppers in a course guide, or who develops an effective feedback technique needs to share that information with his faculty colleagues and, possibly, present it to the distance education community at large through the medium of such publications as a *DETC Occasional Paper*. These timid souls not only do themselves a personal disservice, they also tend to limit the overall effectiveness of the faculty and the institution's ability to communicate productively with its student body. The "timid soul syndrome" should not in and of itself be grounds for adverse action on the part of the school, unless the reticence is somehow transferred to the student who is in fact, the bully.

We are all familiar with the scenario of a student terrorizing a classroom, as portrayed in the movie entitled *The Asphalt Jungle*. In a more salient example of this problem, one student, after being admonished for his poor performance, attempted to intimidate the professor and, indirectly, AMU, by threatening to take his case to the "accrediting agencies" because he was not afforded "due process." The teacher, not himself a timid soul, but one whose feelings were easily bruised, brought the issue to the Academic Dean and the matter was resolved without further obfuscation. The basic issue involved was that of feedback. Neither side in the dispute was without guilt.

Teaching at a Distance from a Distance

Another area that needs to be discussed deals with how AMU has handled its faculty. This requires some explanation. First of all, as stated earlier, AMU decided that the type of faculty it needed could not be assembled at one place and, therefore, the faculty, as was going to be the case with the students, had to be handled at a distance. Here the point of dedication to teaching came into play. As mentioned above, the basic formula is:

credentials + subject specialization + devotion to teaching = AMU faculty membership.

To achieve this alone is an achievement, and probably all institutions in DETC accomplish it in their own way. AMU's added ingredient is doing it at a distance which, while not a unique phenomenon, has been different enough to warrant its exposition here.

These are some of the considerations in this regard:

- The faculty selection process must include a provision for assess-

ing the ability to work independently. This can be done by adding a question to that effect on any reference forms used in the process and by calls to colleagues who know the candidate. The candidate should know in advance that this will be a primary consideration in the selection process.

- An effective, graduated course development process must be implemented so that the institution can ascertain that all of its requirements are being met in a timely fashion. At AMU, each faculty member is the proponent for one (sometimes several) subject courses. In each case, the course development procedure involves the submission of a suggestion for a subject course by the faculty member, approval or modification of the subject by AMU, the submission of a Course Outline by the faculty member including, as a minimum, the scope and objectives of the course, an outline of weekly lesson assignments, and the proposed bibliography. Upon approval or modification of the Course Outline by AMU, the Faculty member is directed to prepare the Student Course Guide. This document is a combination of three things: a syllabus, administrative instructions, including useful forms for the student to communicate with AMU, and any additional instructional notes the professor might wish to include—maps, charts, photographs, etc., that will add to the learning process. If the amount of this additional material is somewhat large, an Instructional Research Package is prepared by AMU and distributed to the students at cost.

- AMU schedules each semester's courses six months in advance so as to allow time for updating of previously presented courses, or for the approval process, including copyright clearances, book ordering, etc.

- A continuing faculty assessment program which begins during the recruiting process, the course development process, and the

course teaching process. Self-assessment is accomplished through checklists that provide a level of conformity without interfering with academic freedom, and the ubiquitous end-of course critique by the students taking the course.

- A program for keeping the far-flung faculty apprised of university developments and policy changes through the periodic publication of a newsletter devoted solely to faculty matters. Individual issues are handled expeditiously through the use of the telephone or the mails.

- By, insofar as possible, standardizing all procedures to ensure a zero-error and seamless interface with each faculty member on the basis of equality. This ensures that no one is slighted, or that each faculty member receives the same level of attention, unless the situation warrants otherwise.

Author's Note

A paper like this cannot be prepared without the feeling that one is "preaching to the pulpit." I am sure all of these techniques have been used successfully by others. My purpose in this endeavor was to put together ideas and concepts that AMU could have used when it started and which evolved as we moved ahead. I would appreciate any comments, questions, or criticisms that might arise from the contents of this paper from readers of this paper.

About the Author

Dr. John E. Jessup received his Ph.D. in Russian Studies and an MA in International Affairs from Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. He is also a graduate of the U.S. Army Foreign Area Specialist Training program in Russian and the executive management program of the College of William of Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia. He served as an infantry and Special Forces officer and spent his last five years on active duty as Chief, Histories Division, U.S. Army Center of Military History.

Dr. Jessup is the author of a number of books and has lectured and taught in the U.S. and abroad on international security issues and military history. In 1992, he joined the staff of the American Military University, Manassas, Virginia as Academic Dean and holds that position today. He is a member of the DETC Research and Educational Standards Committee. Dr. Jessup has served as a course evaluator for the American Council on Education since 1987.

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